

## THE MIDDLE AGE NOT A STARLESS NIGHT.

WE frequently hear that in the Middle Age the clergy systematically kept the laity in ignorance; that even the nobility were so uncultivated, that in the public records of those times it is quite common to meet the clause: "And the said lord declares that he knows not how to sign [his name], *because of his condition of gentleman.*" Charlemagne himself, it is said, could not write. But are these allegations true? In the early period of the Middle Age, ignorance was undoubtedly the lot of the warriors who became the progenitors of most of the European nobles; but when these barbarians had become Christians and members of civilized society, is it true that they generally remained in that ignorance?

The learned Benedictine, Cardinal Pitra,\* has proved that in nearly all monasteries there were two kinds of schools—the internal, for the youth who wished to become religious; and the external, for the children who showed no such vocation. And do we not know how Abélard's retreat, the Paraclete, was filled with hundreds of young laymen, zealous for knowledge? Vincent of Beauvais

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\* In his "Histoire de St. Leger."

(y. 1250) writes that "the sons of the nobility need to acquire expensive learning;" and Giles of Rome (1290) says that "the children of kings and of great lords must have masters to teach them all science, and especially a knowledge of Latin." The nobles are said to have despised learning, but we know that they were very zealous in founding schools. Thus at Paris alone six colleges were established by noble laymen; that of Laon, in 1313, by Guy of Laon and Raoul de Presles; that of Presles, in 1313, by this Raoul; that of Boncourt, in 1357, by Peter de Fléchinel; that of the Ave Maria, in 1336, by John of Hubaut; that of La Marche, in 1362, by William de la Marche; that of the Grassins, in 1369, by Peter d'Ablon. The researches of Du Boulai, of Crevier, and in our own day, of Beaurepaire, show how untrue is the assertion that the mediæval laity were plunged in woful ignorance. In the thirteenth century, at least, all the peasants of Normandy could read and write, carried writing materials at their girdles, and many of them were no strangers to Latin. Bertrand de Born, William of Aquitaine, and Bernard of Ventadour, bear witness that then at least the nobles of France were no more hostile to letters than the peasants were, and that they shared in the poetical movement of the South. The first chroniclers who wrote in French were nobles and laymen—Villehardouin and Joinville. In 1337 we find the scions of the first families

following the courses of the University of Orleans. As to the documents which they are said to have been unable to sign, "because of their condition of gentlemen," such papers do not exist, and no paleographer has yet unearthed one containing the alleged formula. Certainly, in order to obtain some proof of this mediæval ignorance, some have had recourse to the crosses traced at the foot of documents of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and to the absence of signatures in those of the thirteenth. "But this pretended proof can not stand the tests of diplomatic science," remarks M. Louandre. "In those days deeds were not authenticated by written names, but by crosses and seals. The most ancient royal signatures are of no earlier date than that of Charles V. (of France)," who died in 1380.\*

Even in the early Middle Age every cathedral, and nearly every monastery, had its school and library, in accordance with canonical enactments. Hallam admits that "the praise of having originally established schools belongs to some bishops and abbots of the sixth century;" but—at least so far as Ireland is concerned—it is certain that her schools were celebrated throughout Europe in the fifth century. As to the Continent, we find the Council of Vaison recommending, in 529, the institution of free parochial schools. To mention

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\* In the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*" for Jan. 15, 1877, p. 452.

only a few of similar decrees, there is a canon of the Third General Council of Constantinople, in 680, commanding priests to have free schools in all country places; one of a Synod of Orleans, in 800, ordering the parochial clergy "to teach little children with the greatest kindness, receiving no compensation, save the voluntary offerings of parents;" one of Mentz, in 813, commanding parents to send their children "to the schools in the monasteries or in the houses of the parish clergy;" one of Rome, in 826, prescribing schools in every suitable place.

As to higher education, not only was it not neglected, but the most celebrated universities were founded and perfected in the "dark" ages. Most renowned was the Irish school of Benchor (Bangor) with its thousands of scholars, and the other Irish establishments at Lindisfarne in England, at Bobbio in Italy, at Verdun in France, and at Wurzburg, Ratisbon, Erfurt, Cologne, and Vienna, in Germany. The great University of Bologna, an outgrowth of the school for law there established by Theodosius II. in the fifth century, became so famous under Irnerius (d. 1140) that of foreigners alone more than ten thousand thronged its halls.\* The Univer-

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\* The University of Bologna was a corporation of scholars who were divided into two great "nations"—Cismontanes (Italians), and Ultramontanes (foreigners)—each having its own rector, who must have taught law for five years and have been a student of the University, and *could not be a monk or friar*. The students elected this rector, and none of the pro-

sity of Padua frequently numbered eighteen thousand students. Famous also were the Universities of Rome, Pavia, Naples, and Perugia; of Paris; of Alcalá, Salamanca, and Valladolid; of Oxford and Cambridge. In Germany the thirteenth century was an unfortunate one for letters. Leibnitz says that the tenth was golden compared with the thirteenth; Heeren calls it most unfruitful; Meiners constantly deploras it; Eichorn designates it as "wisdom degenerated into barbarism." But the fourteenth century brought a change to the Germans. The University of Vienna was founded in 1364; that of Heidelberg in 1386; of Erfurt, 1392; of Leipsic, 1409; of Würzburg, 1410; of Rostock, 1419; of Louvain, 1425; of Treves, 1454; of Freiburg, 1456; of Basel, 1459; of Ingolstadt, 1472; Tübingen and Metz, 1477; Cologne, 1483. Gerard Groot, a student of Paris, founded in 1376, at Deventer, his birthplace, an order whose members were sworn to help the poor, either by their manual labor or by gratuitous instruction. "Very soon this order," says Cantù, "associating thus the two passions of that time—piety and study,—taught trades and writing in those monasteries which were called of St. Jerome, or of the Good Brethren, or of the Common Life; while in other places it kept schools of writing and of mechanics for poor chil-

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fessors had a voice in the assembly unless they had previously been rectors. However, in the faculty of theology the professors governed. Popes Gregory IX., Boniface VIII., Clement V., and John XXII., addressed their Decretals "to the doctors and scholars of Bologna."

dren. To others it taught Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Mathematics, and Fine Arts. In 1433 it had forty-five houses, and in 1460 thrice that number. Thomas à Kempis transported the system to St. Agnes, near Zwolle, where were formed the apostles of classic literature in Germany: Maurice, Count of Spiegelberg, and Rudolph Langius, afterward prelates; Anthony Liber, Louis Dringenberg, Alexander Hagius, and Rudolph Agricola."

As to the pretended ignorance of Charlemagne, we prefer more ancient and more reliable authority than that of Voltaire, the author of this assertion.\* In the "Acts" of the Council of Fisme, held in 881, we read that the members exhorted King Louis III. "to imitate Charlemagne, who used to place tablets under his pillow, that he might take note of whatever came to his mind during the night which would profit the Church, or conduce to the prosperity of his kingdom." It was the celebrated Hincmar who, in the name of the Council, drew up these "Acts" of Fisme; and certainly he is good authority in this matter, for he had passed much of his life in the society of Louis the Compliant, a son of Charlemagne. But is not

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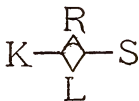
\* Voltaire makes this charge four different times, but in contradictory terms. In his "Essai sur les Mœurs," in the Introduction, he says that Charlemagne "did not know how to write his name." In chapter xix he adduces Eginhard to this effect. In the "Annales de l'Empire" he says that "it is not likely that this Frankish King, who could not write *a running hand*, could compose Latin verses;" and in another place of the same work he says that the monarch "could not write his name *well*."

the testimony of Eginhard, son-in-law of Charlemagne, to be preferred to that of the prelates of Fisme? Sismondi, who admits the extraordinary learning of the great Emperor, is so impressed by the words of Eginhard, that he concludes that the monarch acquired his knowledge by means of oral teaching. We would prefer the authority of the bishops of France headed by Hincmar, to that of Eginhard; but the two testimonies do not conflict. Eginhard says: "He tried to write, and he used to keep tablets under the pillows of his bed, so that, when time permitted, he could accustom his hand to the forming of letters; but he had little success in a task difficult in itself, and assumed so late in life."\* Eginhard admits, then, that Charlemagne had some success in his endeavors. We know, too, that he could form his monogram;†

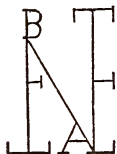
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\* "Tentabat et scribere, tabellasque et codicillos ad hoc in lecticulo sub cervicalibus circumferre solebat, ut cum vacuum tempus esset, manum effigiandis litteris assuefaceret; *sed parum prospere successit* labor præposterus ac sero inchoatus."

† In the space occupied by a *K* he put the other letters of his name, "Karolus:"



In Papal letters of the Middle Ages we often meet the monogram of "Bene valete:"



and Lambecius, the erudite secretary of Christina of Sweden, speaks of a manuscript of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans "corrected by the Emperor's own hand."\* We are therefore led to accept that interpretation of Eginhard's remark which is given by Lambecius, and since that critic's time by the best commentators, such as Michelet,† Henri Martin,‡ and Guizot;§ to the effect that there is therein no question of writing in general, but merely of a running hand. In fine, Charlemagne could write by means of what we style square or printed characters; he found it difficult to write a running hand; in other words, he could write, but he was not a calligrapher. Ampère opines that the monarch tried to excel in the art of illuminating manuscripts,—that is, of painting the majuscule letters which so excite the admiration of moderns.

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\* "Commentaria in Bibl. Cæs. Vindob.," b. ii, c. 5. Vienna, 1655.

† "Histoire de France," edit. 1835, vol. i, p. 332.

‡ "Histoire de France," edit. 1855, vol. ii, p. 292.—"It would be strange indeed if this great man, who was versed in astronomy and in Greek, and who labored to correct the text of the Four Gospels, was unable to write."

§ "Histoire de France, Racontée à Mes Petits-Enfants," vol. i, p. 228. Paris, 1872.—"It has been doubted whether he could write, and a passage of Eginhard might authorize the doubt; but when I consider other testimonies, and even this very remark of Eginhard, I incline to the belief that Charlemagne wrote with difficulty and not very well."



Since Eginhard is adduced to prove the ignorance of Charlemagne, it is well to note what this chronicler tells us, in the same chapter, about the Emperor's learning. Charlemagne spoke Latin fluently and with elegance; Greek was familiar to him, although his pronunciation of it was defective. He was passionately fond of the fine arts. He drew to his court the wisest men of the day—*e. g.*, Peter of Pisa and Alcuin, and very soon he nearly equalled his masters in their respective branches. He began the composition of a Teutonic grammar, and he undertook a version of the New Testament based on the Greek and Syriac texts. He understood perfectly the intricacies of liturgy, psalmody, the Gregorian Chant, etc. During his meals he listened to the reading of histories; he was especially fond of St. Augustine's "City of God." He preferred to attend the schools he had founded, rather than any kind of amusement. Furthermore and finally, he compelled his daughters, as well as his sons, to cultivate the fine arts.

In this so badly understood epoch, flourished Abélard, Dante, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas. It is true that the hunting and soldiering barbarians at first disdained the peaceful triumphs of letters, and regarded the fine arts as a disgraceful inheritance of the people they had conquered; that for a time even the olden subjects—of the secular order—of Rome lost taste for the sublime and the beautiful. But then science found friends in the sanctuary and in the cloister; and the clergy preserved,

as a sacred deposit, the traditions of literature and art. As for moral science, have modern times surpassed SS. Anselm and Peter Damain, Lanfranc or Peter Lombard? As for practical science and the arts, are we much more advanced than our mediæval ancestors? We will here mention a few of the inventions and improvements which we owe to these compassionated men:

I.—The paper on which we write (linen) is, according to Hallam, an invention of the year 1100; and cotton paper was used in Italy in the tenth century. Casiri, drawing up a catalogue of the Escorial Library, says that most of its mediæval manuscripts are of rag-paper, or *chartaceos*, as he styles them in contradistinction to the membranous and cotton ones. He cites the “Aphorisms” of Hippocrates in a paper codex of the year 1100, but does not deem it remarkable. Venerable Peter of Cluny, in a treatise against the Jews, speaks of books made from the shreds of old clothes.

II.—The art of printing, or rather the *press*, was invented in 1436, either by Lawrence Coster, a priest of the Cathedral of Harlem and a xylograph printer, or by the artist Gânsfleish, called Gutenberg;\* but printing by hand was done in the

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\* The Abbé le Noir, in his re-arrangement of Bergier’s “Dictionary,” analyzes the known facts concerning this invention, and thus concludes: “Coster, we believe, invented and first employed movable types. Gutenberg came across Coster’s plans, perfected them, and with invincible patience

tenth century. The "Chronicles of Feltre" tell us that Panfilio Castaldi, a humanist of that city, taught his disciple Faust, in 1436, the use of movable types. Stereotyping, now the perfection of printing, was practised by Coster; though of course he knew of no way of casting the plates.

III.—That music may now be called a science is due to an Italian monk, Guido of Arezzo, who determined the scale, hitherto uncertain, in 1124. His "solmization"—or the use of the *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la*—was signified by means of the words of the first verses of the Vesper hymn for the Feast of St. John the Baptist. Before the time of Pope Gregory the Great (el. 590), the Italians used an alphabetical notation composed of the first fifteen letters; but that Pontiff reduced them to the first seven for the diatonic scale, distinguishing the octaves by capitals for the lower, and small letters for the upper. Ughelli proves, in his "Sacred Italy," that the Italians used pneumatic organs in the ninth century.

IV.—In the twelfth century, the mariners of Amalfi first applied the knowledge of the loadstone to navigation, thus enabling subsequent Italian navigators to prosecute geographical discovery.

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tried to execute them on a grand scale. But, constantly needing funds, he was forced to put himself into the hands of an adroit banker, Faust, who played upon him the trick he himself had played upon Coster: appropriated the invention and gathered the profits."

V.—It is amusing to learn that in those days of alleged ignorance, and hence of presumed neglect of study, one of the most important aids to study should have been invented. To enable persons of defective eyesight to read, the ancients used a sphere filled with water; but about 1285 a monk of Pisa, named Salvino d'Armato, invented spectacles. In a sermon preached in Florence on February 23, 1305, the celebrated friar, Giordano di Rivalta, said: "Only twenty years ago were spectacles invented; I knew and conversed with the inventor."

VI.—By a people's language we can surely judge of their refinement and intellectual calibre. Humboldt may have erred when he pronounced that grammatical forms are not the fruit of the progress made by a nation in the analysis of thought; but he was right in saying that these forms "are results of the manner in which a nation considers and treats its language." And we are asked to believe that the densest ignorance and the grossest sentiments were the portion of those times which produced the sweet and philosophic Italian, the majestic Spanish, the graceful French, and the forcible English and German tongues. When the decay of the Roman Empire and of Roman civilization had entailed that of the Latin language, the succeeding jargons could not be termed languages; but Christianity took hold of the raw material, and, to use the words of Gioberti, "placed therein the embryonic principles

of new organizations, and fecundated them with the hieratic word, performing the two duties symbolized by the Oriental myths of the cosmic egg and androgynism. Thus the modern idioms were born from the material of the old, informed and organized by the religious idea and by the sacerdotal word. At first each of these idioms was a mere dialect,—that is, a vulgar speech, rude, ignoble, private, unfit for public use and for writing; not yet possessed of a life of its own, independent of the mother's. And just as the fetus becomes a man, the human animal an infant, coming out into the light, and entirely separating from the maternal body, so a dialect is transformed into an illustrious language, fit to signify ideal things through the work of noble writers, who divert it from popular usage, and introduce it into the forum, the temple, the schools, and the conversation of the learned.”\*

VII.—Have the modern times rivalled the Middle Ages in architectural skill and taste? With the exception of St. Peter's at Rome—itself a result of the *spirit* of that despised period,—all the most magnificent structures of Europe, all the real triumphs of architecture, are of mediæval conception and execution. Glass windows, too, introduced in the fourth century, commenced to present beautiful colors in the early Middle Age; and in the twelfth century the Church, by means of those wonderful window-pictures, developed her plan, begun in the

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\* “*Primato Civile e Morale degli Italiani*,” Capolago, 1846, vol. it, p. 275.

Catacombs of Rome, of reaching the hearts and intellects of such of her children as, perchance, were not penetrated by the words of her preachers.

VIII.—In 650 windmills were invented; in 657, organs; Greek fire in 670; carpet-weaving in 720; clocks in 760; in 790 the Arabic numerals were introduced; in 1130 the silkworm was first cultivated in Europe; in 1278 gunpowder was invented; engraving in 1410; oil-painting, though many ascribe it to Van Eyck, was in use in 1415.

As for the science of criticism, which many regard as a peculiar pride of our century, it is generally supposed to have been so little understood as to indicate by its absence the intellectual inferiority of the Middle Ages. And yet modern critics can point to very few questions, agitated by themselves, which were not raised during that period. It is a remarkable fact that while the critics of the Golden Age of Leo X. credited the tales of Annio of Viterbo (the Chatterton of the fifteenth century), and while even the skeptics of the “Encyclopedia” believed in Ossian, the darkest century of the Middle Ages—the eleventh—disputed the authenticity of the false “Decretals” of Isidore Mercator. Centuries before the Protestants of England and America gave up their persecution of witches, Bishop Agobard and King Luitprand had condemned such absurdity (ninth century); and the former had protested against trials by combat, and against ordeals by fire and water. Nor can modern times claim the credit

of having discovered what is called the Copernican system; for Bishop John of Salisbury (d. 1180), and four centuries before him the Irish monk, Virgilius (Ferghil), had taught the correct mundane system and the existence of the antipodes.

Never in modern days have the pretensions of sovereigns been more jealously watched and more heartily resisted by the peoples than in the days so generally supposed to have been a period of prostration before royal caprice. Whereas the legislation of ancient Rome had established the sole will of the prince as the reason of all law, the Canon Law of the Church, a crowning glory of the Middle Ages, taught that law supposes the consent of the people, and has for its end only the good of the community. As far back as the eighth century Rattier, Bishop of Verona, proclaimed that human nature is ever equal to itself, and that therefore no man has received from God the right to command his neighbor. The science of government has never been laid down better than by the Angelic Doctor, that light sufficient of itself to dissipate the darkness of an entire epoch.\*

No modern abolitionist has more earnestly pleaded in favor of universal freedom than did the monk

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\* "Two things are necessary to found a durable order of things in the state. All must be participants in the general government, so that all may have an interest in maintaining the public peace. That form must be adopted which combines all powers most happily. The happiest combination is that which places at the head a virtuous ruler, who will surround himself with a number of notables who will rule accord-

Smaragdus in the eighth century. The masses were no more content in those days than they are now to quietly accept whatever they found at hand. "Every dogma, rite, and system," observes Cantù, "found champions and opponents; and the political heresies of Arnold of Brescia and of Friar Dolcino, the philosophical ones of Origen and of Abélard, the religious ones of Photius and of the Albigenses, left nothing new for Luther and Socinus to pronounce. And what if we reflect that these rude ancestors of ours civilized half the world; that by the translation of the Bible modern languages were formed; that hymns were composed which were sung by the most refined centuries; that entire nations were withdrawn from licentious and ferocious superstition? Undoubtedly, much was wanting; but deny, if you can, to Alexander the title of consummate general because he would not have been able to conquer at Leipsic or to reduce Antwerp; or the title of poet to Homer because he was ignorant of geography and astronomy."

In the Middle Ages the science of government had already been able to abolish that system of centralization which in later times became, and is yet,

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ing to equity; and who, being taken from every class by means of a universal suffrage, will thus associate the entire people in the cares of government. In its beneficent organization such a state would combine royalty, represented by its one head; aristocracy, in its magistrates chosen from among the best citizens; and democracy, manifested in the election of the magistrates, effected in the ranks and by the voice of the people." (See Ch. Jourdain's "*La Philosophie de St. Thomas d'Aquin*," vol. i, p. 407.—"*Summa Theol.*," p. 1, 2, q. 2, c. 8, a. 7.)



the curse of modern Europe. In England, then perfectly Catholic, parliamentary government was developed, at least as to its essentials; for the English liberties date from the Charter of Henry I. in 1103; and above all from the great Charter of John Lackland in 1215; and the Provisions of Oxford in 1258, the source of the House of Commons. Spain had her liberties developed in her *cortes*, and Germany in her diets. In France political life was nourished by the Champs de Mars and of May, and then by the Estates. And in Italy, where the influence of the Papacy was the most immediately exercised, the most favorable ground for republican institutions was found and cultivated; the glories of the mediæval republics of Genoa, Pisa, Sienna, Florence and Venice, need no description. This last point is beyond contestation; political liberty existed in the "dark" ages, and under the full domination of the Catholic Church.\*

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\* Balmes says: "The greatest development of the royal power in Spain occurred on the appearance of Protestantism. In England, commencing with Henry VIII., it was not monarchy that prevailed, but a cruel despotism, the excesses of which could not be disguised by a vain shadow of representative forms. In France, after the wars of the Huguenots, the royal power was more absolute than ever. In Sweden, Gustavus mounts the throne, and from that moment the kings exercise almost unlimited power. In Denmark, the monarchy perpetuates and strengthens itself. In Germany, the kingdom of Prussia is formed, and absolutism generally prevails. In Austria, the empire of Charlemagne retains all its power and splendor. In Italy, the little republics disappear, and the peoples recur to the domination of princes. In Spain, the ancient *cortes* of Castile, Aragon, Valencia, and Catalonia, fall into abeyance."

Well might Augustine Thierry call the Middle Ages the real epoch of liberty. Even in the Papal States, the government of which at this period might naturally be supposed to have been redolent of absolutism, the Popes of those days carried on their government in union with their people,—that is, with the “Roman Republic.” It was not until 1353 that Cardinal Albornoz, legate of Pope Innocent VI. (residing at Avignon), tried to introduce a sovereignty like that in other monarchies by destroying the petty lords; but even he guaranteed many of the ancient privileges by his “Egidian Constitutions,” which for centuries remained the real public law of the Romagna; and down to the revolution of 1797 the pontifical sovereignty remained rather nominal than despotic. In fact, not before the Congress of Vienna, in 1815—the royal members of which, says Cantù, wished that all mediate jurisdiction should cease, and that, especially in Italy, no written rights of the people should exist,—did absolutism in any sense prevail in the Papal States.\*

Nor was the will of a nation, as to its choice of a ruler, a thing generally ignored in the Middle Ages. In England the early kings mounted the throne only with the consent of the “witans,” or great ones;

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\* “Absolutism was an entirely new thing in the Papal States,” says Cantù; “and when Pius IX. initiated and blessed the Italian movement, he protested, in his Constitution of March 14, 1848, that he did nothing but ‘restore some ancient institutions which were for a long time the mirror of the wisdom of our august predecessors;’ and that ‘in the olden time our Communes had the privilege of governing themselves,

and the olden writers ordinarily speak of election as the title to reign of their sovereigns. Even after the Norman Conquest, William and his first successors rested their claims on the national will. After the death of the Lion Heart, it was the great council of England, assembled at Northampton, which definitely settled the crown on John Lackland; and at the coronation at Westminster the primate justified the exclusion of Arthur by alleging the right of the nation to choose, from among the royal princes, him who seemed to be most worthy of the sceptre. In Germany, after the death of the last descendant of the German branch of Charlemagne, an assembly of the lords placed Conrad I. on the throne,—subject, of course, as was ever the case, to confirmation by the Roman Pontiff. This right to choose the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire afterward passed to the ten, and then to the seven Electors. In France, from the very origin of the monarchy, the nation participated in the inauguration of the supreme power. Under the Carlovingian dynasty the sovereign was proclaimed in a general assembly, and then raised on a buckler supported by the chiefs of the nation. And these notables exercised, down to the fall of the Merovingian dynasty, the right to depose unworthy kings; thus, Childeric I. was deposed

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under laws chosen by themselves, with the sovereign sanction.' Behold one of the thousand proofs that liberty is old and despotism new. But to-day, all moral and political sense being lost, the name of one is bestowed on the other." ("Heretics of Italy," *dis. viii.*)

because of his oppressions, and Childeric III. on account of imbecility.

When Charlemagne divided his states among his three sons, he decreed that "if one of the three brothers should have a son *whom the people would be willing to elect* to the kingdom of his father, his uncles should consent." Similar dispositions were made by Louis le Debonnaire in his two successive divisions of the empire. When Louis le Bègue was crowned at Compiègne, he styled himself "King, by the mercy of God and the choice of the people." On the death of Louis V., his successor by heredity should have been his uncle, Charles of Lorraine; but as that prince had alienated the hearts of the people, the prelates and lords met at Senlis in 987, and gave the crown of Charlemagne to Hugh Capet. Nor can it be said that the *people* were ignored in all this development of the exercise of political right; for the Third Estate—all of the nation that was not clergy or nobility\*—shows itself during the Middle Ages ever vigorous and aggressive. In France, at least, the political life of the Third Estate began with the monarchy. After the king came his

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\* Some have held that the Third Estate comprised only the middle class, what we now call the *bourgeoisie*; but this opinion is historically false. The ordinance of Louis XVI., convoking the Estates of 1789, speaks of the immemorial right of attending the Third possessed by "all the inhabitants who are French by birth or naturalization, of twenty-five years of age, domiciled, and subject to taxation."

“leudes,” or great vassals, who were the source of the nobility, or “grande noblesse;” then came the *people*, composed of freemen (“*ingenui*”) and serfs. The freemen, possessors of their own lands (called “*allodiales*”), were obliged to military service. These men voted in the general assemblies of the nation or the Champs de Mars or of May. Behold the origin of the Third Estate. But with the twelfth century began the great influence of this body. Louis le Gros emancipated the Communes, gave liberty to the cities, and thus started municipal life. The Benedictine Abbot Suger—the greatest statesman of his age, who ruled France under Louis le Jeune,—developed these liberties, and very soon serfdom disappeared in the greater part of the kingdom. Under the Capetian kings, the Estates General, properly so called, succeeded the old assemblies of the nation, the first solemn reunion being held under the arches of Notre Dame de Paris in 1302, and the people having their votes and *cahiers* equally with the clergy and nobility. And the resolutions of this assembly surpass, in some respects, the modern guarantees of constitutional government.\*

Montesquieu, that genius whom Cantù appropriately characterizes as “imprisoned in his own century,” was constrained, despite his prejudice as to the “barbarism” of mediæval law, to avow that government was then “well moderated;” and precisely

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\* See Augustin Thierry’s “*Essai sur l’Histoire de la Formation du Tiers-Etat*,” ch. 2, Paris, 1853.

because “the civil liberties of the people, the prerogatives of the nobility and clergy, and the power of the sovereign, moved in concert.” When even the positivist Augustin Thierry declares that the Middle Ages formed “the true epoch of freedom,” one is prepared to hear Montalembert—who, with the sole exception of Cantù, penetrated the spirit of this calumniated period better than any other modern publicist—announcing his conviction that “the Middle Ages were the era of really representative government, of institutions more sincerely and efficaciously representative than any which have been imagined since that time. Yes, representative government was born in the Middle Ages, and belongs to them. It was born of a natural combination of the elements which then constituted society; it came from the common action of the Church, Catholic royalty, the owners of the land, and the emancipated municipalities.”